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ABSTRACT

Social studies educators live and teach in the middle of an information revolution as the Internet becomes an integral part of education. The rate of Internet use in the classroom has risen dramatically. From 1994 through 1998, the percentage of public schools with Internet connections jumped from 35 percent to 89 percent. This Digest summarizes ways that classroom teachers can combine the Internet with other instructional resources and methods. Web sites and ERIC resources are cited that offer ways to explore the Internet and to incorporate it into the social studies curriculum. Web site topics of interest are Civil War photographs, the women's suffrage movement, early ranching in Nevada, Gross National Product per capita data, key economic ratios, and long-term trends for nations. Information and web site examples are given for creating a "portal" site for a school's social studies department. A portal is a World Wide Web site designed to serve as a main "point of entry" to the Web. It features an extensive catalog of Web sites and other Internet resources, a search engine, or both. The Digest describes virtual field trips as another way of using the resources available on the World Wide Web. Web sites for the White House, exhibitions of African and pre-Columbian Native American art from the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Egyptian pyramids offer opportunities for creating virtual field trips. Web site addresses for samples of published student work and social studies lesson plans also are included. (LB)

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Teaching Social Studies with the Internet

By C. Frederick Risinger

Social studies educators are living and working in the middle of a revolution—the emergence of the Internet as an integral part of education. This Digest summarizes ways that classroom teachers can combine the Internet with other instructional resources and methods. It is a basic guide for the novice and a checklist for the more experienced Internet user. The web sites and ERIC resources cited in this Digest and included in the references provide the "next steps" for exploration and implementation.

Growth of Internet Use in Schools. In 1994, the federal government established a goal of linking every school to the Internet by the year 2000. It appears that we are very close to reaching that goal. From 1994 through 1998, the percentage of public schools with Internet connections jumped from 35 percent to 89 percent. More important is how the schools are connected. A dedicated line is much faster than a dial-up connection and allows higher-level use of the Internet. Since 1994, the percentage of schools with dial-up connections has dropped 52 percent, while the number of those linked by dedicated lines have risen over 26 percent. Finally, the ratio of students per instructional computer is fast approaching that recommended by the President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology. While some troubling differences in computer access and Internet connectivity still exist between inner-city and rural schools and suburban and medium-sized city schools, the level of computer access for teachers and students is rapidly improving in the United States (Rowand 1999).

Using Primary Sources. Teachers have long recognized the value of students reading accounts of historical events written in the words of those who were there. Excerpts from James Madison's journals kept during the Constitutional Convention is a typical example of the primary sources that teachers use to explain how the Constitution was developed and how it is interpreted today. But the Internet opens the way to an enormous range of resources. For instance, imagine reading Tacitus's eyewitness account of the burning of Rome, including the descriptions of "terrified, shrieking women" and "helpless old and young" fleeing the conflagration, or Corporal E.C. Nightingale's frightening memories from on the deck of the battleship Arizona in 1941. Both of these are available to teachers and students at <http://www.ibiscom.com>, one of several commercial web sites that provide superb resources for teachers and students.

The most complete web site for U.S. history teachers is the "American Memory" site <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ammemhome.html> of the Library of Congress. In addition to a collection of Civil War photographs, "Voices of the Dust Bowl," and a collection of documents from the women's suffrage movement, this site features outstanding collections on social history. These collections include baseball cards from 1877 to 1914, African-American sheet music from 1850-1914, and "Buckaroos in Paradise," a look at ranching in early Nevada.

Many web sites include photographs, songs, and even motion picture excerpts. A Pentium-based computer and a fast Internet connection are necessary to use these resources effectively, but imagine the projects students can develop with them.

Primary sources are available in social studies content areas other than history or government. All sorts of economic data, including Gross National Product per capita, key economic ratios, and long-term trends for every nation are available at the World Bank's site <http://www.worldbank.org>. A good web site for economics teachers is managed by Kim Sosin and his colleagues James Dick and Mary Lynn Reiser at the University of Omaha <http://ecedweb.unomaha.edu/teach.htm>. From lesson plans to links to all sorts of helpful sites, economics teachers will find what they are looking for.

School or Class Portals. One of the best ways to use the Internet to help students and teachers is to create a "portal" site for a school's social studies department. A portal is a World Wide Web site designed to serve as a main "point of entry" to the Web, and features an extensive catalog of Web sites and other Internet resources, a search engine, or both. Portal sites for individual grade levels, subjects, or courses are frequently part of a school's larger portal site. Portals especially for teachers can include links to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) site, professional development opportunities, ERIC clearinghouses, and other resources. Student pages can include homework assignments, a course syllabus, links to resources specifically tailored to class assignments, and even grading rubrics. In some communities, parents are encouraged to use these sites to stay informed of student assignments and school news.

Some excellent examples of school, departmental, and course sites are:

- Princeton, Ohio <http://www.phs.princeton.k12.oh.us/>
- Alachua, Florida social studies site (includes the Florida social studies standards) <http://www.sbac.edu/~fhs/SocStudHome.htm>

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- Montgomery County, Maryland Schools social studies program <http://www.mcps.k12.med.us/curriculum/socialstd>

Virtual Field Trips. Teachers and students can take field trips via the Internet. From a visit to the White House <http://www.whitehouse.gov> to exhibitions of African and pre-Columbian Native American art in the famed Art Institute of Chicago <http://www.artic.edu/> to a tour of the Egyptian pyramids <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/pyramid/>, many historical and contemporary sites are just a few mouse clicks away. Additionally, since many of the virtual field trip sites are designed specifically for education, they feature lesson plans and student activities, many of which are interactive. One of the best sites for tours and well-designed instructional materials is the Discovery Channel Online <http://www.discovery.com>.

But do not stop with "taking" students on field trips in the classroom or assigning students to view field trips as part of an individual or group assignment. Students can create their own virtual field trips of local historical sites, or even of their school. Once they see a few field trip sites, they will understand how to design their own sites. With a digital camera and a bit of practice, students can create excellent projects. To see what a group of students in grades 3-12 did with a five-day virtual journey across the world, visit <http://www.win4edu.com/minds-eye/journey/>.

"Publishing" Student Work. Everything that teachers once displayed on bulletin boards, from traditional essays to student artwork, can be posted on classroom or school portal sites. Even more elaborate projects, such as the five-day world journey described above, can be published on the site. Tim Dugan's ninth graders at Princeton (Ohio) High School participated in an interdisciplinary project on twentieth-century history and statistics. They researched a Jewish cemetery in Cincinnati, created a database of the gravesites, and made connections with some of those buried there to significant historical events <http://www.phs.princeton.k12.oh.us/Public/Lessons/>. To see what third-grade students in a rural southern Indiana school can do with a project on China, point your web browser to <http://www.fi.edu/fellows/fellow1/apr99/>.

Lesson Plans. There is an almost overwhelming number of web sites with lesson plans. Some of them are designed specifically for the content on their site, such as <http://www.discovery.com>. Others are compilations of lesson plans developed for a specific project, such as those from the NCSS/Keizai Koho Fellows project on teaching about Japan <http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/>. Nearly all of them can provide useful ideas for teachers, although the lessons may require some revision to meet specific needs of local curriculum guides and student/teacher needs. Just type "social studies lesson plans" into any Internet search engine and be prepared for thousands of hits.

Conclusion. This Digest includes just a few examples of how the Internet can be used by social studies teachers and students. A recent Internet search indicated between 5,000 and 1.5 million web sites on the combined topics "social studies" and "teaching and learning."

For both novices and more experienced, Internet-savvy teachers, the sites listed below are recommended.

- <http://www.ncss.org> - The NCSS web site.
- <http://www.indiana.edu/~ssdc/eric_chess.htm> - The ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education (ERIC/ChESS) site.
- <http://www.execpc.com/~dboals/boals.html> - Don Boals' all-purpose site for social studies teachers.
- <http://www.indiana.edu/~socialst/> - A similar all-purpose site, managed by the author of this Digest.
- <http://www.socialstudies.com> - This commercial site offers a wealth of resources.
- <http://www.history.org/nche/> - The site of the National Council for History Education.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

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